

DITA: Past, Present, and Future


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What is DITA?

The Darwin Information Typing Architecture or DITA is an XML-based data model for structuring, developing, managing, and publishing content. Originally created by IBM in 2001 to more efficiently reuse content in product documentation internally, it is now an open standard that is defined and maintained by the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) DITA Technical Committee.

Why Darwin?

The naturalist Charles Darwin noted that plants and animals inherit traits from their parents in his theory of natural selection. Likewise, many elements in DITA do the same.

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Introduction

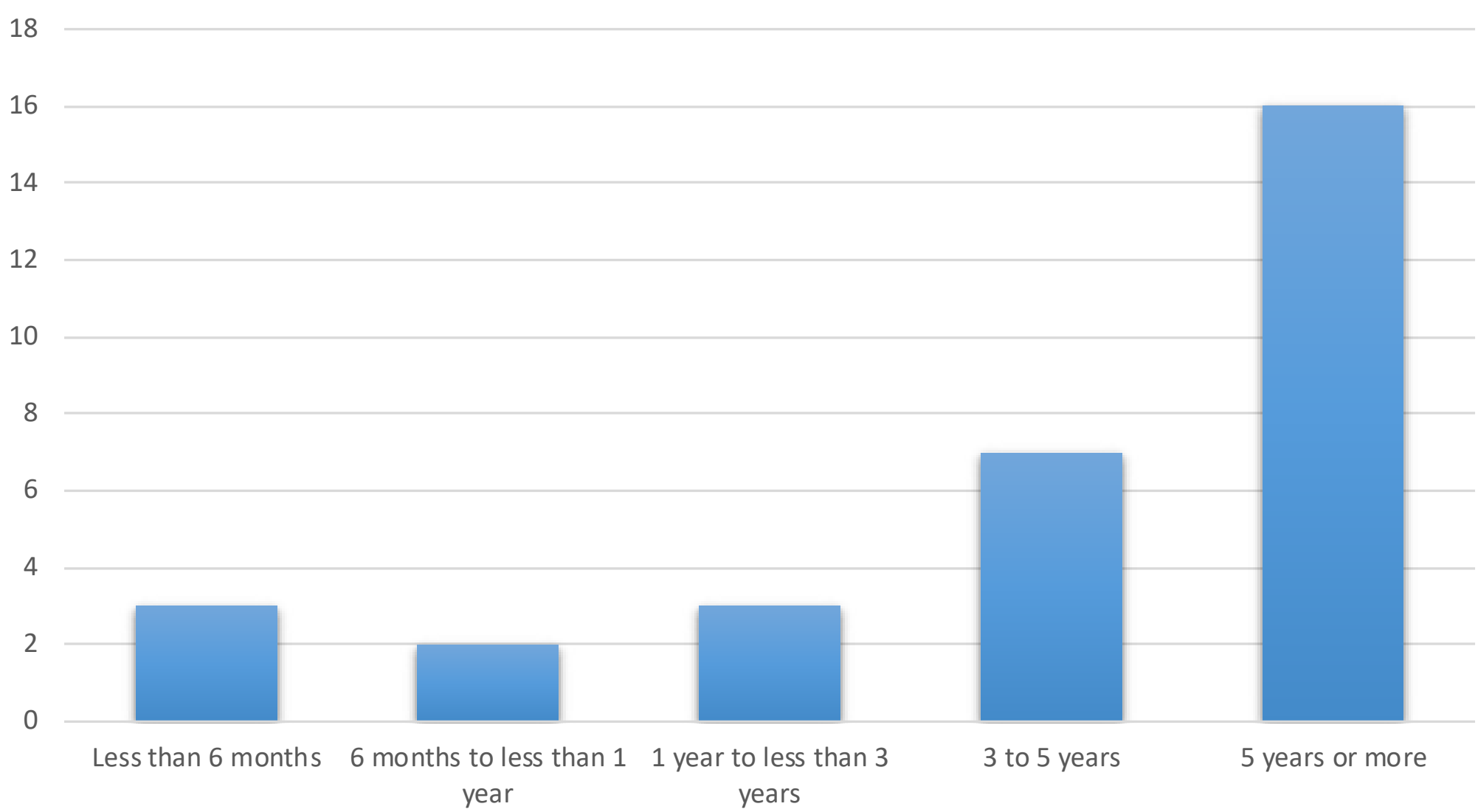
The technology and tools used by technical writers are constantly changing and evolving. One tool in particular has become one of the most popular technical writing tools used by technical writers, the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA). To gauge the usefulness and potential lifespan of DITA, I surveyed technical writing professionals who have utilized DITA in their work. In doing this, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how DITA is utilized, whether practitioners are recommending it as a tool, and if they think it will still be around in the next 5 to 10 years.

Methodology

- Qualtrics survey available online for one month
- 30 questions
- Required participants to have experience with DITA

39 Participants

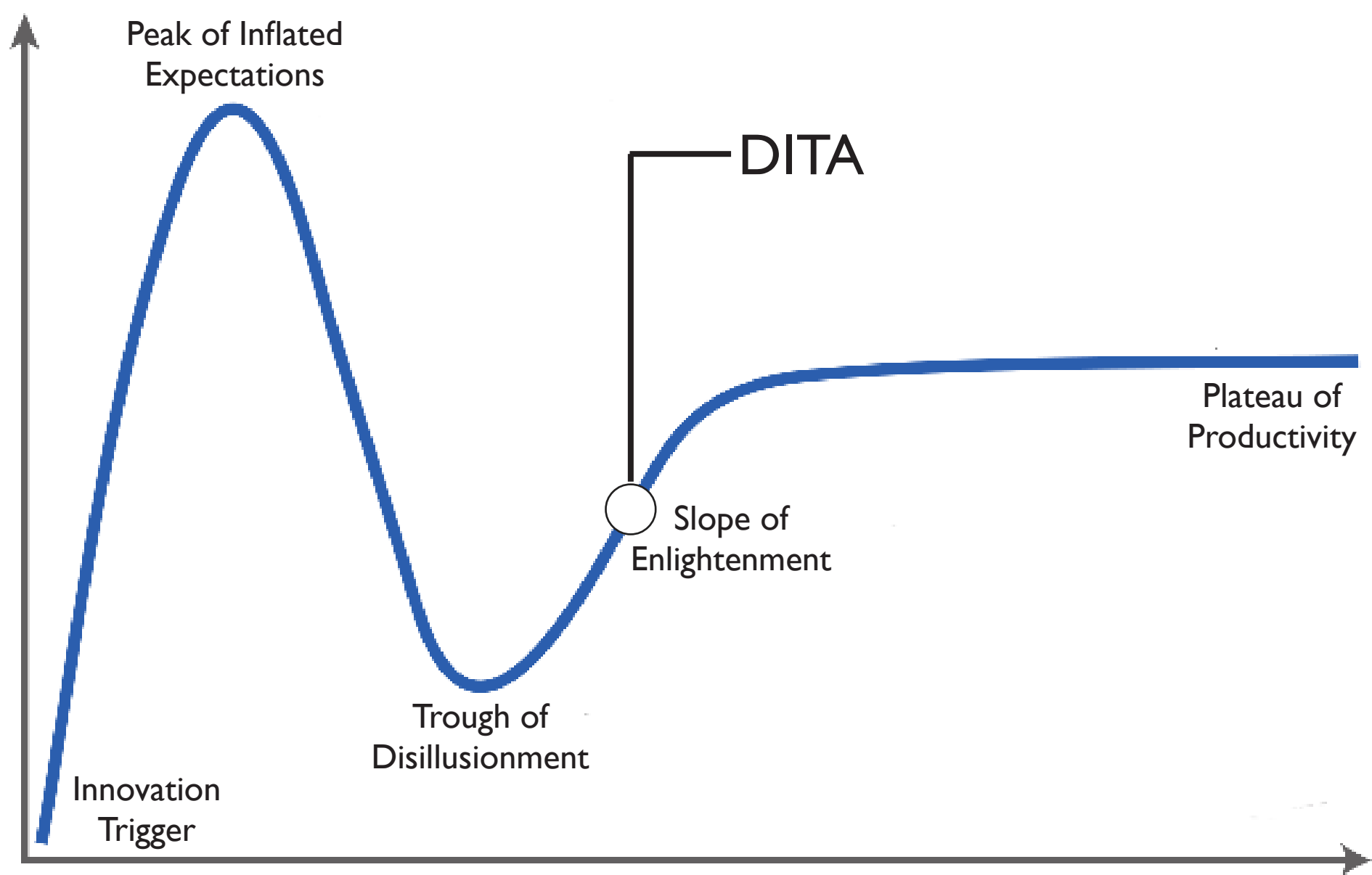
How Long Have You Used DITA?



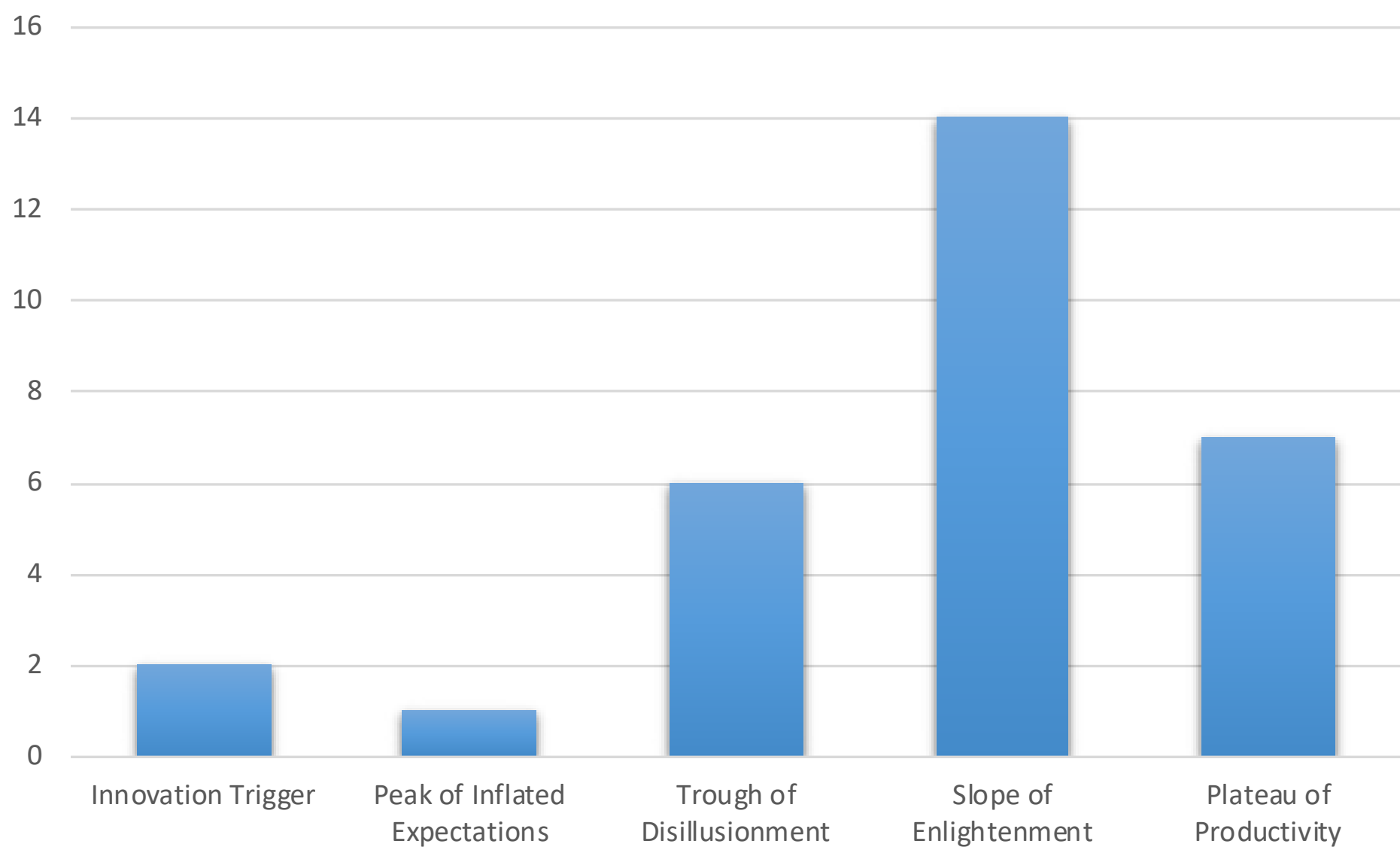
Findings

- 70% of survey participants believed that DITA would definitely still be used in 5 to 10 years
- Participants who had used DITA for less than 3 years were more likely to be unsatisfied with DITA and they were even less likely to recommend it to other professionals. These participants were also the ones who believed DITA was in the Trough of Disillusionment.

Gartner Hype Cycle



Where Do You Feel DITA Is Currently In Its Hype Cycle?



Looking Ahead

- This is a tool that we should expect to continue using for more than 5 years. Knowing this, it is important that budding technical writers take time to pursue this topic in their education.
- What can we improve about DITA to make it better?

“We need to get some new blood working on the specs and move out some of the know it all consultants” that make all of their money by charging customers hundreds of thousands of dollars for unnecessarily complex implementations.”